I am writing to provide the Public Petitions Committee with a response to petition 1551 (Mandatory reporting of child abuse). I understand that there was an official undertaking to update the committee in January 2018; this update has been delayed as officials became aware of the pending publication of the findings from the U.K. Governments consultation. As the committee will be aware, the Scottish Government wanted to ensure that consideration was given to all evidence including these conclusions.

The U.K. Government announced their intention to hold a consultation on mandatory reporting in October 2014. The consultation was delayed until July 2016, and closed in October 2016, receiving 768 responses. A summary of the consultation and Government action was published 5 March 2018.

The report states that following consideration of the evidence and views raised in the consultation the case for a mandatory reporting duty or duty to act has not been made. The U.K. Government therefore does not intend to introduce a mandatory reporting duty at this time.

I am aware that other countries, including the Northern Irish Assembly, have already introduced varying degrees of mandatory reporting, or duty to act. Evidence of the benefits of this implementation have yet to be fully realised and have not yet been proven.

After careful consideration of the findings from the U.K. Government report and with reflection of these findings within the Scottish context, the Scottish Government considers that the case for introducing mandatory reporting is not sufficiently compelling at this time.

The Scottish Government remains committed to the safety of children and young people.

The effectiveness of the Scottish child protection system will be further improved by allowing the embedding of a number of current initiatives:

- The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry which was set up in 2015 is looking at the abuse of children in care and will make recommendations to Scottish Ministers to improve the law, policies and practices in Scotland.
- The Child Protection Improvement Programme established in 2016, is an ongoing programme that will oversee the implementation of nine interconnected work strands to help deliver our child protection system vision. This includes looking at leadership and workforce development to ensure we have effective, adaptable and responsive services in place.
- The Independent Care Review, launched in May 2017, will identify and deliver lasting change in the care system and leave a legacy that will transform the life chances and wellbeing of infants, children and young people in care.
Officials will continue to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the Scottish child protection system working closely with stakeholders and any relevant U.K. Government officials. We will consider any new or emerging evidence that suggests that mandatory reporting would improve the outcomes for children and young people in Scotland and will act accordingly.

As things currently stand, the Scottish Government will not introduce legislation making mandatory reporting a legal requirement.